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## GACELA OF WINTER

Gaelics, and advisers, and ripe pears —  
the war is everywhere

to have a fondness is to have a weakness  
a man alone is alone with his demons

the fiends who write the books he writes  
postcards from Venice the letters the angels

the man who waits is too busy to break  
my wife my wife “my wing my wing”

or does the sky do your breathing for you  
birds?

From beneath a mild rock  
steps some animal form cautiously

a sweater or a shower, who knows,  
I saw her walking up the driveway

all we ever see is light.  
What it lets. A flare in going

or someone taps — fingertip soft —  
on some door — is it me?

1 February 1995

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Organize as else — a stick lying on the lawn  
one more miracle of where they come,

the *from* of things — not just the particular,  
the dowdy instances of a Venetian no

but the sheer access of success, the sweet  
slippery feel of (as it might be) your skin

under the vaseline of such dramatic sunlight  
as a window in winter — bad for the hands,

cuticles, canticles — that Gill cathedral  
spotted, with measled brick, alarmed

so near to Victoria, flight to the continent  
(St Crikey-on-the-Strand) just back from Pigalle

to witness the amendment of our state —  
memory chatter, *bandar log*, the blether

(Carlyle rarely delicate) pastis in a thick glass  
the sacrilege of personal preference

(le vice anglais) come back to vineyard  
(spores of American must) oil cloth kitchen table

sticky under elbows as we lean o' nights  
waiting our share of the wireless (Rilke

insinuating from galactic closenesses) (news  
is really out of hand) the Russians

are at it yet again — no peace  
with that master — a bag of suet hangs from the sun

itself a branch of an ill-known tree, and round its root  
the horses of blue expedients champ their breakfast.

2 February 1995

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I have learned nothing and remember nothing  
everything has come and nothing stayed

I am the Wild Boy of Annandale the same  
inside as out same end as beginning not bothered by years

I notice none I am the moon remarkable  
for coming back no fuller than before

□

Watch the pagans eat their antique wheat  
I am all nylon mesh and broken glass

I touch you and people run away from me  
so they can remember me in peace

a city a bunch of haggling mountaineers I am  
busy to sell you this magic carpet my skin

on which you sit so comfortable  
I can almost believe your body is my mind

I am tired of writing you the plastic buttons  
in the windows on the Rue du Temple wink

troll eyes in broken daylight I am a bridge  
a broken radiator I am sleek with escapes

frameworks no language owns me I give  
myself to them all I know nothing

fish trapped beneath clear ice ill-formed  
letters a swirl of light you hear me

the one that's really me is changeless  
watch out that makes me almost you

that might be my leg in your trousers my tongue  
presses the back of your teeth I am churches

made of brownstone and wax  
I am tired of having to tell you who I am

don't you know by now haven't you learned anything too?

3 February 1995

## COLTSFOOT VARIATIONS 2

The things I want of you  
are wobbly things

meek as tissue  
stuck to an underlip

woods and muds  
and touch you

you crouch to answer  
all that upward

the contradiction  
is built right in

the hollow bone.

3 February 1995

## COLTSFOOT VARIATIONS 3

In the senate-house of course  
the old men remember their skins

heartbeats Oldsmobiles fried  
calzones September sweat-stains  
beneath the purple of her satin blouse

it is a flower it is a flower  
punch in your PIN number  
the high redundancy of dance  
leap up and fall again  
land on the stricken glassy  
face of our friend Mars

you plunge  
into the night of feeling  
everything touches you.

3 February 1995

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How could it be wrong?  
The measurement  
is white — duck in snowstorm  
only the language has color —

from China we learned  
the veins of stone  
are actual —alabaster—  
avenues, the boats

are genuine, are feminine,  
we wake wet from our dreams,  
the jungle. Oh if there  
were highways in the air,

to walk orderly in emptiness!

4 February 1995

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Gay people — their bodies are louder than the weather,  
they dress for love in any season. The reason  
is the feel of it, the world against their skin,  
from which identity arises, the doom of touch.

Auden wore no underwear — what have we  
to learn from that, while the wind blows so hard  
and the night is so late? A pleasure beyond persons  
to which only persons lead. A conviction

to be fearless in pursuit of your own feelings.  
The senses are made with that in view,  
'these foolish' (because general) 'things'  
that are all that we can ever do.

4 February 1995

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*Giving birth to the mind* it said  
(which mind?) (the mind successively, progressively, itself)  
(the mind until you get to mine) (how much help  
is talking here) *and the woods* (which woods?)  
*are ready for your cry.*

The finches wait  
till the sun is decently over the hill  
before attacking their seeds. And when they do,  
some mourning doves come in to browse  
on what they spill. Till then they repose  
on snowy branches, plump  
inconspicuous. They are ground foragers,  
the dependencies. And the crows  
are the most patient of all,  
wait till the mind has migrated away  
then feed on what is left.

It is hard to think about birds  
without their smooth but broken flight  
getting into the rhythm of our breathing.  
Swoop or fall, a breath of me becomes them.

5 February 1995

## THE INVITATION

Sit down and be no one.  
I know your faces,  
they are mostly mine  
except for a couple—  
that wife-eyed vague one  
when you look like France  
seen from the chalk at Dover,  
or the intelligent squint  
when you seem to ask  
yourself (only yourself)  
if you've fulfilled this  
situation, is this planet  
your actual home. Otherwise  
you're me. Except the nose  
is smaller, the eyes  
look over my shoulder.  
They see  
everything that isn't me.

5 February 1995

A LETTER TO MARCUS AURELIUS FROM AN  
EMPTY WORLD

1.

Just look at this thing like wire, a tree  
strung between aluminum and cumulus  
as if there were anybody there

Do you believe the vacancy of things,  
did you plunder those semitic caravans of thought  
that used to lurch across our common desert

to find the old man, sheik or rabbi, who can tell  
by name, murmuring of *ain* and *ain soph* sometimes  
and sometimes *the no-limit light*

which spreads all round us, in us — is us, even,  
as we sputter our easy verses and our sympathies  
violet and saxifrage and musk, knowing all the time

that nothing forms the interior of things,  
the wiry intestines of our actual forms  
are just a convoluted emptiness, a focused void?

2.

For all my thick desirings, I have a rather  
aristocratic sense of what I do— the words  
that speak me do not need much hearing,

I listen hard, and maybe no one else does need to.  
And there's nobody again. It's not possible  
that this tree exists just for itself,

it's for all of us, everyone tall and everyone hard  
and all the soft enduring earth it stems from

and all the blue invaded air it occupies

as we are penetrated by each one of us.  
Who is this solemn nobody inside me now,  
talking to the lively aftermath of you?

3.

Maybe some of this makes song to you.  
And maybe a bird's a camera that holds us  
tidy in our places, I endure

as something some bird saw, a shadow  
slower than his own, a dark hand scattering seed.  
I want to coax you to be a limb of me,

a me before my time, and full of almost truth  
I can go to work on with knife and alphabet  
to turn spectacular. Always and always

to praise the one that came before me  
but talk in a louder voice than he,  
the kind of marriage where you shout I do, I do

every day of your life and the woods are empty.  
But everything is full of emptiness—  
that's what the rabbi's smile implied.

5 February 1995

## FLYING OVER IONIA

All that worry waits for me  
(personless pronouns, the fun house, a fan  
whirring in an empty room)

because I have seen the Greek islands  
sprawl in the sundrench of my drowse  
I know the fragility of place

looked down and tried to wake, *this*  
*is the birthplace of how I mean,*  
but the sea was blue, the sun

dissolved all the coasts in its one glare,  
and all I had was a film of feeling  
that blurred my seeing, down there

is sex and war and modern art  
and god knows what they listen to  
the personless torments of sincerity

and no boat coming, and all at once  
I guessed (breadless, sudden, salt)  
a shore beyond this shifting.

6 February 1995

## A C A M E R A

I wanted this to be here, ready for you to read it,  
a line following a line. Find a part of the sky  
no bird has ever entered. A village ignorant of fire.

How long it took to learn the delicate camera of the body,  
aim, focus, time, expose, develop, touch—  
years and years before the first tentative snapshot's done

and then forever after that face's power — that there are  
faces, that you can see them, that they mean  
inside you and go on speaking — we live in each other —

and the one we've seen never leaves us lonely.  
I wanted this to be here for you when you woke,  
like a rose — none too fresh — on your part of the table

where one splash of sunlight sneaks through the drapes.  
It's not the sort of thing we usually talk about (roses,  
instrument) but we are finally faces. You become

what I mean when I am seeing. Speaking. A day  
is like a camera too, the dark body first, then open  
something and take in. I think that's why I want this

to lie before you at breakfast, sticky with apple juice,  
so you can take it in and me along with it when you come down,  
as part of the innocent morning, the table, the door.

6 February 1995

IN MEMORY OF JAMES MERRILL

Held at the mercy of the drummer  
the ordinary skin begins to gasp  
until the room is panting with their hips,  
bones, tossed hair, scarves, lapels.

Made thirty years ago, a masterpiece  
of lyrical ennui, the irony of effort,  
the song of doors. Tati's *Play Time*,  
Paris, without the city. Children

of the Paradise without the nuisances of plot.  
In color. We see the colors of time,  
in fact, like the spectacular sunrise  
color of buses and exhausted makeup

and a man like every other man  
disappears — somehow — on a not very  
busy street, among all his sauntering kindred,  
vivid, interesting, tiresome, adorable,

lost. Watching the slow semantic  
antics of each gesture they make, these sad  
lost lovely Frenchmen, I think from time to time  
of John's phonecall this afternoon.

He said: James Merrill died today. (Pause.)  
But he died suddenly. Could it be he hardly  
noticed it? Long tracking shot. You look away  
for a minute and the man in the raincoat is gone.

7 February 1995

I LIVED WHERE THE B14 ENDED AND YOU  
CAUGHT THE B13 DOWN TO THE SEA

Salt water and dark birds and says it, says it —  
fearful of those tyrants he invented  
Touch and Tell and Go To Hell.  
Here by the beach the mystery's disemboweled—  
the hidden skin becomes the public flag.  
Why I am not a socialist, he thinks.  
Only the private has "what I call" value.  
This quoting is like thinking, but is not thinking,  
an idea not yet entirely his own.  
He grew. Desirous of ceremonial, he enriched  
each street with carnelian shadows he called women  
and a despair that was just his own. Summer shade  
was best, they could all be waiting for him there,  
welcoming and quick like busses, open, open  
the valves of such vehicles and hurry inside them,  
they alone have the property to bring him where he needs.  
Nothing changes. The streets are all enmeshed  
in the tacky energies of his desires. Everything is more.  
The touch was that way. Years later he could still feel  
the rivet-lumpy glossy painted columns of the subway  
press against him cool in all those empty nights.

8 February 1995

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It is something to talk about these things,  
her alabaster shadow in running water,  
shimmering pebbles under shallow Delaware

or a bread box standing open in the wind,  
dry crust and old cookies, a hard baguette  
shoved in on the bias to make it fit

there are no natural vacancies any more.  
I like the kind that has a sheet of wood  
on the inner surface of the dropfront,

for slicing bread. I like the kind of bread  
I carried up the nameless road to La Borne  
waving wild to keep the horseflies off

till the farmer trotted his brown mares  
down into poplars by the river and no more.  
Anything you do every day, day after day,

even if only for a month or two, becomes  
an everlasting part of you—  
I love the quick habits that we form

but wish they could dispel as quickly  
so I could see nothing in the hurry  
of the river but water, water, water.

8 February 1995